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R 011524Z AUG 73
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
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INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KABUL
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AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UR, AF
SUBJ: THE USSR AND AFGHANISTAN AFTER THE COUP
REF: KABUL 5540 (m)

1. SUMMARY: SOVIETS REACTED WITH EQUANIMITY TO AFGHAN COUP, ACTED WITH ALACRITY TO CEMENT RELATIONS WITH NEW GOVERNMENT, AND EMERGED WITH THEIR POLITICAL POSITION UNSCATHED, EVEN STRENGTHENED. RADICAL DEPARTURES IN SOVIET POLICY TOWARD AFGHANISTAN APPEAR UNLIKELY IN VIEW OF CONSTRAINTS IMPOSED BY LARGER SOVIET OBJECTIVES IN THE IMMEDIATE REGION AND ASIA AS A WHOLE. SPECULATION ABOUT SOVIET COMPLICITY IN THE COUP REMAINS UNSUBSTANTIATED AND WE ARE INCLINED TO DISCOUNT IT. END SUMMARY.

2. SOVIET LEADERSHIP'S MESSAGE TO DAUD PUBLISHED JULY
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28 WAS CORDIAL BUT MEASURED, MAINTAINING THE DETACHMENT SOVIETS DISPLAYED AT EVERY STAGE OF ADJUSTING TO NEW GOVERNMENT. WHILE SOVIETS REFRAINED FROM EMBRACING DAUD WITH OPEN ARMS, THEY APPARENTLY REGARD HIM FAVORABLY AS A KNOWN QUANTITY AND MOVED SWIFTLY TO TAKE UP RELATIONS AS SOON AS HIS CONTROL APPEARED FIRM. IMPORTANCE SOVIETS ATTACH TO RELATIONS WITH AFGHANISTAN PERHAPS BEST REFLECTED IN PRAVDA'S JULY 31 FRONT-PAGING OF DAUD RESPONSE TO SOVIET MESSAGE, WHICH WARMLY THANKED USSR FOR BEING FIRST TO RECOGNIZE THE REPUBLIC.

3. MEDIA TREATMENT OF AFGHANISTAN SINCE THE COUP HAS BEEN POSITIVE BUT BLAND. NEW TIMES JULY 30 EDITION PROVIDED ITS READERS WITH GENERAL BACKGROUND ON AFGHANISTAN, INCLUDING FACT THAT AFGHANISTAN HAD BEEN FIRST COUNTRY TO RECOGNIZE NEW SOVIET STATE IN 1919. ITS SKETCHY TREATMENT OF DAUD FOCUSED ON HIS EFFORTS TO BRING COUNTRY OUT OF BACKWARDNESS AND ON HIS FOREIGN POLICY OF "POSITIVE NEUTRALITY" DURING 1953-63 TERM AS PRIME MINISTER. LITERATURNAYA GAZETA AUGUST 1 PUBLISHED A "DOSSIER" ON AFGHANISTAN WHICH ADDED A FEW BIOGRAPHIC FACTS ABOUT DAUD AND NOTED WITHOUT ELABORATION THAT HE HAD VISITED THE USSR IN 1956, 1959 AND 1961. LIKE THESE TWO ITEMS, DAILY PRESS TREATMENT HAS AVOIDED SPECULATION BUT HAS EMITTED GOOD VIBRATIONS IN ITS COVERAGE OF HARD NEWS.

4. AS EVIDENCED IN KOSYGIN'S SPEECH DURING MARCH VISIT TO IRAN, SOVIETS ARE ACUTELY CONSCIOUS OF DELICATE POLITICAL EQUILIBRIUM IN SUBCONTINENT AND WEST ASIA, AND EQUILIBRIUM THEY WISH TO SEE MAINTAINED FOR FORESEEABLE FUTURE. THEY ARE NOT LIKELY TO FAVOR TENSION BETWEEN AFGHANISTAN AND EITHER PAKISTAN OR IRAN, SINCE THEIR LONG-RANGE EFFORT TO CEMENT THE STATUS QUO IN ASIA UNDER THE RUBRIC OF A COLLECTIVE SECURITY SYSTEM (MENTIONED ANEW BY PODGORNYY SPEECH) DEPENDS ON STABLE RELATIONS AMONG THE NATIONS OF THE REGION. MOYQ IS UNDOUBTEDLY CONSCIOUS THAT ANY EFFORT TO ACHIEVE A DOMINANT POSITION IN KABUL WOULD WORRY AFGHANISTAN'S NEIGHBORS, INVITE UNWANTED CHINESE ATTENTION AND POSSIBLY ENTAIL AN UNACCEPTABLE INCREASE IN ALREADY SUBSTANTIAL

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AID BURDEN. WE SHOULD THEREFORE EXPECT SOVIETS TO WATCH CAREFULLY FOR SIGNS OF INTERNAL INSTABILITY BUT TO REFRAIN FROM OVERT INFRINGEMENT OF AFGHANISTAN'S NEUTRALITY AND NON-ALIGNMENT.

5. WE HAVE HEARD COMMENTS AMONG DIPLOMATS HERE SIMILAR TO THOSE VOICED IN PAKISTAN AND IRAN ABOUT ALLEGED SOVIET COMPLICITY IN THE COUP. WE HAVE BEEN IMPRESSED BY THE PAUCITY OF EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THIS THESIS, AND WE AGREE WITH EMBASSY KABUL'S ASSESSMENT (PARAGRAPH 4 REFTEL) THAT EARLY SOVIET RECOGNITION DOES NOT IMPLY FOREKNOWLEDGE. CERTAINLY PODGORNYY WOULD NOT HAVE VISITED KABUL IN MAY HAD MOSCOW AT THAT TIME HAD ANY PREMONITION OF COUP. WHILE LATER INVOLVEMENT CANNOT BE RULED OUT, WE ARE INCLINED TO ACCEPT WORD OF BOTH AFGHANS AND RUSSIANS WHO SAY THEY WERE ALL TAKEN BY SURPRISE.

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